

# STDs in the South

## Public Health Impact

The southern region of the United States consists of the District of Columbia and 16 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. This region has consistently had higher reported rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea and primary and secondary (P&S) syphilis than the other regions of the country (Northeast, Midwest, and West). The reasons for these higher rates in the South are not well understood, but may include differences in racial and ethnic distribution of the population, poverty, and availability and quality of health care services. Regional differences in STD rates are particularly disturbing in light of the fact that STDs can increase the risk of HIV transmission by two to five fold. The high HIV prevalence among child-bearing women living in the South may be due, in part, to the high rates of these other STDs in the region.<sup>1</sup> Data from a randomized controlled trial evaluating the use of STD treatment to prevent HIV suggest that the risk of HIV infection may be reduced by as much as 40% in areas with high STD rates.<sup>2</sup>

## Observations

- The South has consistently had higher rates of gonorrhea and P&S syphilis compared with other regions throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Figures 12, and 27, Tables 14 and 25). From 1996 through 1999, the South also had a higher reported rate of chlamydia (Table 5) than the other regions of the country.
- In 1999, seven of the 10 states with the highest chlamydia rates were in the South (Figure 3, Table 4). Similarly, nine of the 10 states with the highest rates of gonorrhea were located in the South (Figure 11, Table 13). Nine of the 11 states with 1999 reported rates of P&S syphilis that exceeded the Healthy People Year 2000 (HP2000) objective of 4.0 cases per 100,000 persons were located in the South (Figure 25, Table 24). Six of these southern states had reported P&S syphilis rates in 1999 that were at least 1.5 times greater than the HP2000 objective (Figure 25, Table 24).
- In 1999, 243 (92%) of 265 counties with P&S syphilis rates above the HP2000 objective were located in the South (Figure 26 and Figure GG).
- Of the 243 counties in the South that had reported P&S syphilis rates in 1999 above HP2000 objective, 157 (65%) had an increase in the rate from 1998 to 1999 (Figures GG and HH).
- County-specific rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea in 1999 were produced for those southern states submitting county level data (Figures II and JJ). These county level data were reported through the National Electronic Telecommunications System for Surveillance (NETSS), and are provisional for all states shown except Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky,

*Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia* where hardcopy reports have been discontinued based on consistent, high quality, and timely submissions of NETSS data.

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<sup>1</sup>Koumans EH, Sternberg M, Gwinn M, Swint E, Zaidi A, St. Louis M. Geographic variation of HIV infection in childbearing women with syphilis in the United States. *AIDS* 2000;14:279-87.

<sup>2</sup>Grosskurth H, Mosha F, Todd J, et al. Impact of improved treatment of sexually transmitted diseases on HIV infection in rural Tanzania: randomized controlled trial. *Lancet* 1995;346:530-6.

Figure GG. South — Primary and secondary syphilis case rates by county, 1999

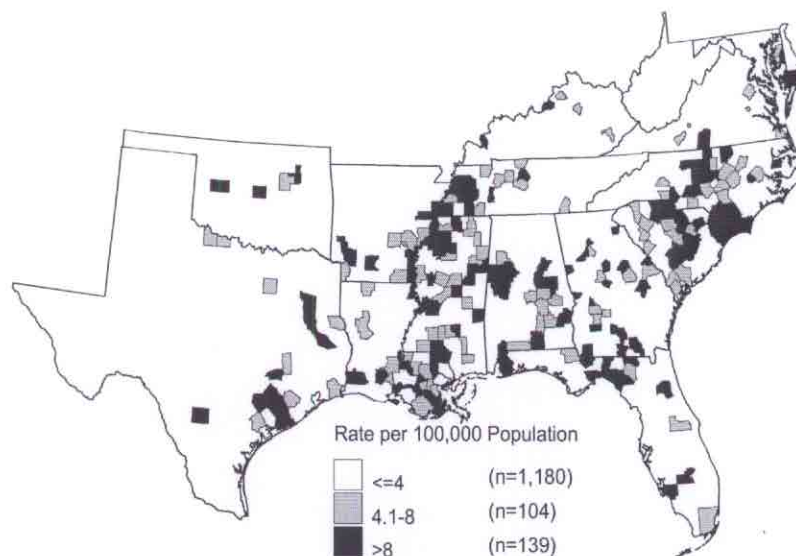
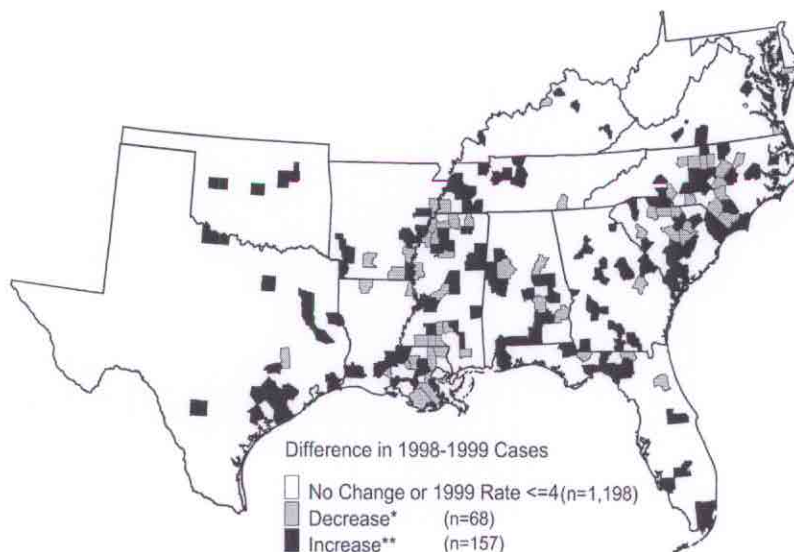


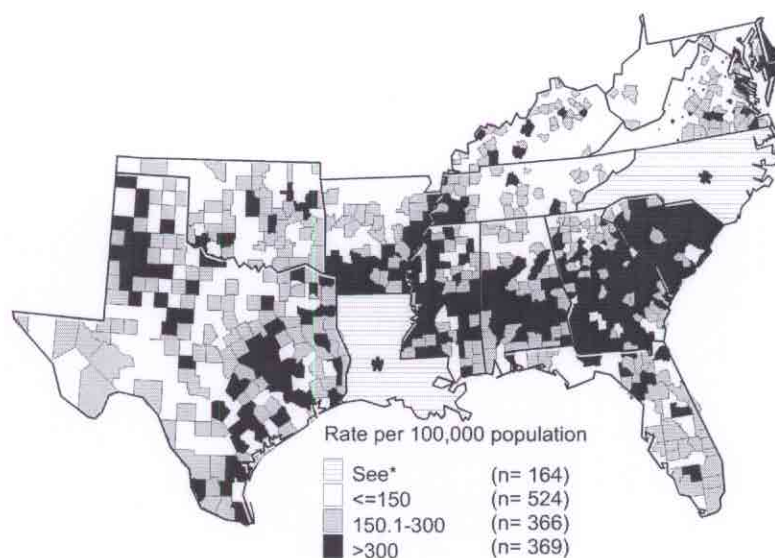
Figure HH. South — Increases and decreases in cases of primary and secondary syphilis in 1999 compared with 1998 cases, by county



\*Decrease in cases in 1999 vs. 1998; 1999 rate >4.0/100,000 population.

\*\*Increase in cases in 1999 vs. 1998; 1999 rate >4.0/100,000 population.

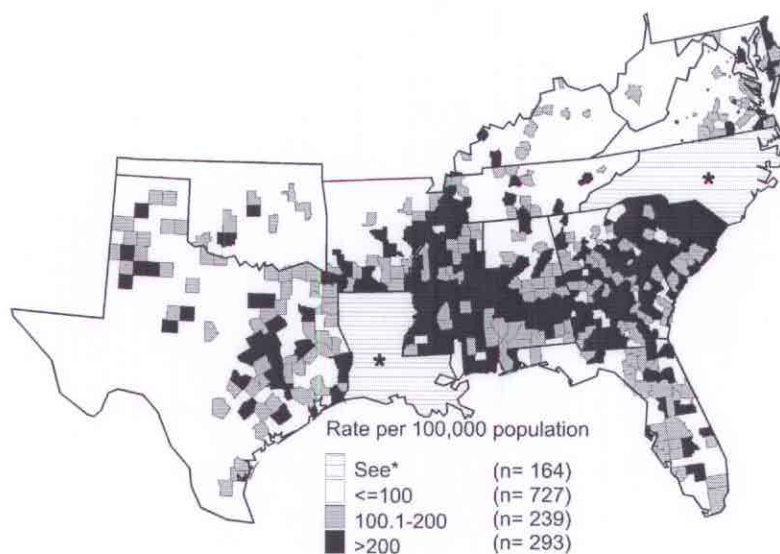
**Figure II. South — Chlamydia case rates by county, 1999**



\*States not submitting county level data.

SOURCE: National Electronic Telecommunications System for Surveillance (NETSS) data

**Figure JJ. South — Gonorrhea case rates by county, 1999**



\*States not submitting county level data.

SOURCE: National Electronic Telecommunications System for Surveillance (NETSS) data